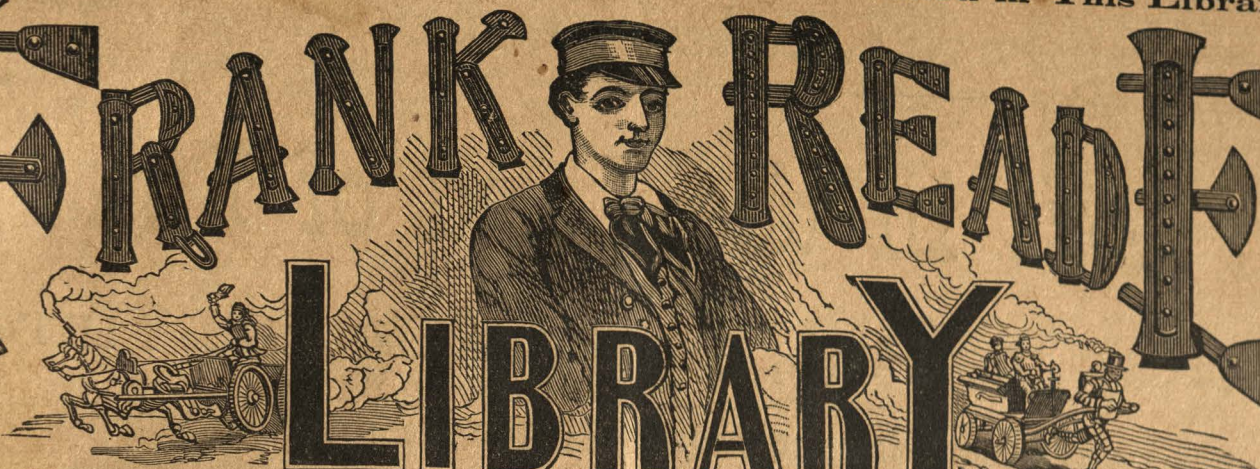


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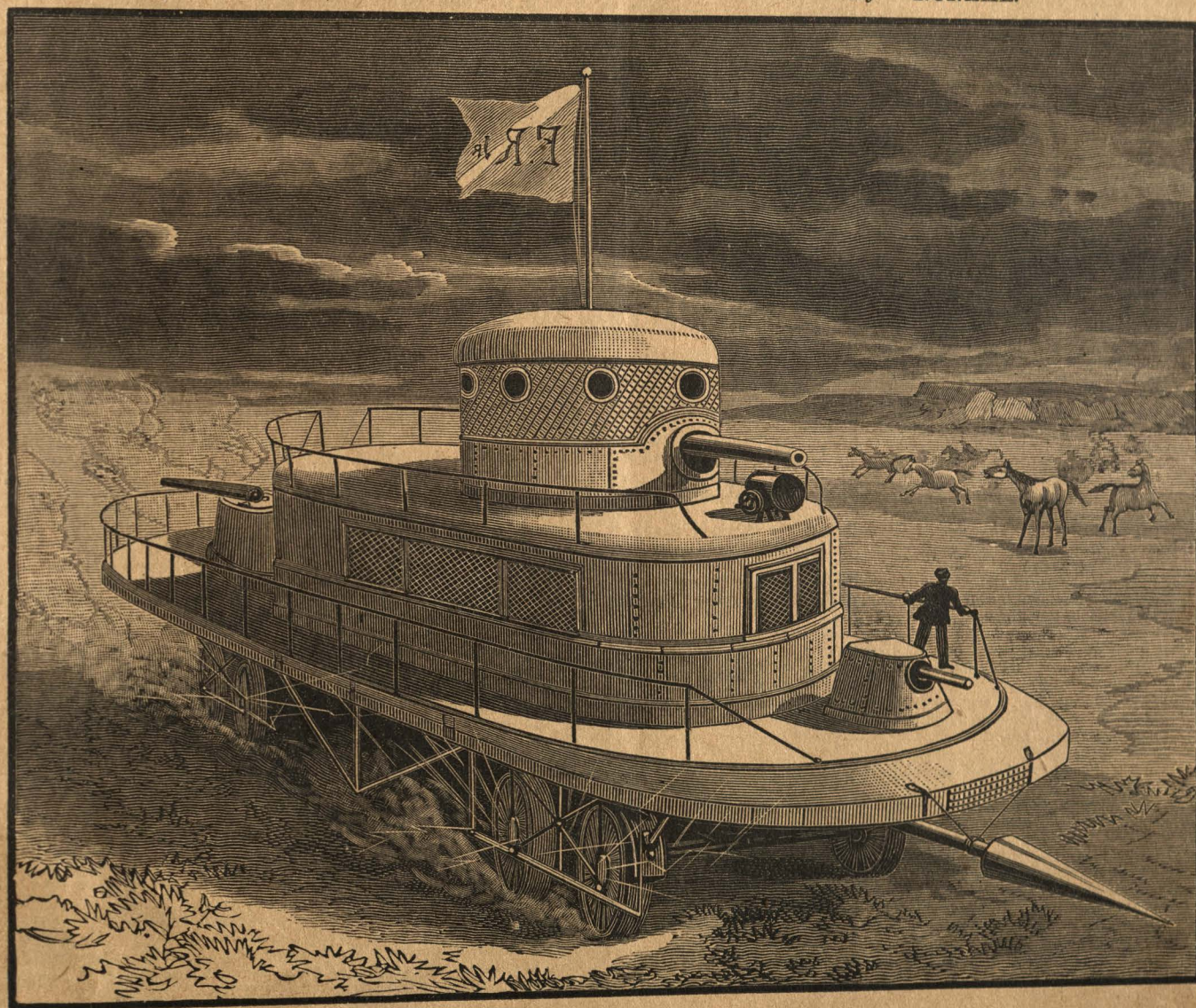
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LOST IN THE LAND OF FIRE; or, Across the Pampas in the Electric Turret.
By "NONAME."



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Lost in the Land of Fire;

OR,

Across the Pampas in the Electric Turret.

A THRILLING STORY OF FRANK READE, JR., IN SOUTH AMERICA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for a Sunken Ship," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Chase Through the Clouds," etc.

CHAPTER I.

EN ROUTE FOR SOUTH AMERICA.

FRANK READE, JR., the most wonderful young inventor of the age, sat in his office at his extensive steel works in Readestown with a satisfied expression upon his face, and a ring of joy in his voice as he spoke to a comical-looking Irishman who stood before him.

"Well, Barney, the Electric Turret is a success. Every detail now is complete and she is ready for use."

The Irishman, whose name was Barney O'Shea, and who was a skilled electrician and an old servant of Frank's, ducked his head in a grotesque way, and replied:

"Bejabers, Misther Frank, it's moighty glad I am to hear yez say that."

"I will say more. I think the Turret eclipses any ground machine I have ever yet invented."

"Shure, sor, an' phwat counthry will we be ather going to now?"

"Are you all ready for a trip, Barney?"

"Shure, sor, I am."

"And Pomp, too?"

"I'll let the naygur sphake fer himself."

Barney stepped to the door and whistled shrilly.

In reply a short, diminutive darky, black as ebony, entered.

He rolled up his eyes comically and bowed to his young master.

"Yo' wan' fo' to see dis chile, Marse Frank?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Wha' yo' want ob me, sah?"

"I have just been talking with Barney about our new invention, the Turret."

"Yes, sah!"

Pomp ducked his head in a comical manner, and glared at Barney who had made a grimace at him.

Barney and Pomp were Frank Reade, Jr.'s favorite servants.

They were faithful beyond reproach but as full of fun and mischief as a nut is of meat.

At every opportunity each was engaged in playing practical jokes upon the other.

"It certainly excels anything I have invented yet!" said Frank.

"Now the question is where shall we go for adventure and sport?"

The two servitors were silent.

Indeed neither knew just what answer to make to this question.

With some one or other of his inventions Frank had visited almost every quarter of the globe.

It was not strange then that he should ask with some perplexity what place of interest it was best to visit now.

Suddenly Barney ducked his head.

"Well?" asked Frank.

"If yez please, sor, I wuz readin' the paper——"

Here Pomp had a violent fit of coughing.

Barney glared at him.

Again he began,

"If yer please, sor, I wuz readin' ther paper this mornin' an' I jist read about——"

Pomp gave a tremendous sneeze. It was of sufficient duration to drown Barney's utterance.

The Celt was mad.

He glared at the Ethiopian again.

Now Pomp's face was as sober and long as a deacon's.

Such an idea, as that he had purposely sneezed seemed entirely out of the question. But Barney was not to be deceived.

"If yez do that thing agan, naygur!" he cried, angrily, "I'll break the nose off yez."

"Ain' done nuffin'!" protested Pomp, with mock indignation

"Yis, yez did!"

"Wha'ebber did I do?"

"Yez interrupted me!"

"Hub! It done take yo' mo' time to say anyfing den it would fo' a lame man to walk to Cincingnati."

"Come, that will do, boys," said Frank, tersely, "let's have no skylarking here. Go on with your story, Barney!"

The two jokers subsided.

Then Barney resumed:

"As I sed, sor, I wuz readin' av the paper whin I seed a bit av a story about South Ameriky."

"About South America?"

"Yis, sor."

Frank was interested.

"What part?"

"Shure, sor, is there a part av it called be the name av the land av foire?"

"The land of fire!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, certainly. That is a part of Patagonia and Terra del Fuego."

"Shure, sor, that was it."

"Certainly it is a region we have never visited. It is called the land of fire on account of the vast pampas fires which they have there. It is a wild and wonderful region."

"Shure, an' the piece told av giants an' a city av white crystal an' the loikes."

"The latter is no doubt a fable," said Frank; "but the existence of the giants is well known."

The young inventor arose and took down a huge atlas from the shelf.

He studied it a moment.

Then he said:

"Upon my word, Barney, you are a brick. You have solved the problem."

Barney looked delighted.

"Yez don't mean it, sor?"

"Yes, I do. Patagonia is in part a level country. We have never yet visited the pampas, and here is a chance."

"Shure, sor, an' yez'll go there?"

"We will see about it. It is a level country, which is all the better for the Turret. That is settled. We will visit the Land of Fire."

This announcement was received with delight by Barney and Pomp.

Pomp cut a pigeon wing, and Barney whistled "Garry Ower."

But let us take a look at the Turret," said Frank, with pardonable pride. "I think she is a beauty."

The young inventor led the way from the office out into the foundry yard.

Across the yard they went and entered the model shop.

Here curious looking frames and designs of wood and steel hung upon the wall, and men were at work.

Passing through this, Frank opened broad doors, and they entered a vast chamber, floorless and with a high trussed roof.

Here the object of his remarks was brought to view.

The wonderful Electric Turret was before them.

Its shape was long and rakish, a deck of light steel set upon a carriage framework, beneath which were wheels with rubber-cushioned tires and strong spokes.

To the hubs were affixed keen blades of steel.

The forward wheels were made to work upon a circle so that the machine could turn about in a small space.

Around the deck there extended a network railing, with gates at convenient points, which could be thrown open.

In the center of the deck there was erected a circular turret of fine plates of steel to the height of three feet. Then above this was a netting extending to the roof of the turret.

In the netting there were loopholes, and through one of these protruded the muzzle of an electric gun.

Just forward of the turret was the pilot house in which also was the electrical engine which ran the machine.

An electric search light of great power adorned the top of the pilot house.

Back of the turret another formidable electric gun was erected upon a steel carriage.

This was capable of throwing a projectile of electric compound fully two miles, with an explosive force sufficient to blow to powder a one hundred ton boulder.

On the front of the machine was a long, keen ram of finely-tempered steel.

This is a crude description outwardly of the electric Turret.

Inside the Turret around its base, were the living rooms of the voyagers.

These were necessarily small, but charmingly furnished and comfortable.

On board the Turret were scientific appliances, weapons and stores of all kinds.

Altogether the electric Turret was a veritable fort on wheels.

Certainly it was a most formidable opponent for an enemy to meet in the open field.

Frank had built it with an eye to offense and defense, for his trips often took him deep into the heart of a savage country.

And the trip to the Land of Fire as proposed, was certainly one involving the greatest of risk.

The report was circulated that Frank Reade, Jr., was going to Patagonia in his electric Turret.

Everybody was interested.

All over the country people talked the matter over.

There were held in the different cities meetings of scientific societies, and offers were made to the young inventor of large sums of money to allow a committee to accompany him on board the Turret in the interests of science.

But Frank declined all offers of this sort.

Money was no inducement whatever to him, and he preferred to take only Barney and Pomp with him.

This angered some of the cranks, and as a result he received many eccentric and threatening letters.

But he burned these and went ahead with preparations.

The Turret was packed in sections aboard a train of cars, and shipped to New York.

There it was placed aboard a special steamer, which was to land the adventurers upon the coast of Patagonia, and after an interval of a certain time, was to return for them.

Frank was decided to thoroughly explore Patagonia.

He would find the nation of giants, invade the Land of Fire, and search for the golden city of Manola.

Barney and Pomp, of course, were all enthusiasm and ready for the start.

As time went on the whole country became in a furore over the matter. Frank's name became more famous than ever.

But this did not add one whit of conceit to his nature.

Finally all arrangements were perfected in full.

The Turret was packed and en route to New York.

The three voyagers took leave of Readestown and their friends amid a grand celebration.

They reached New York in safety and went aboard the steamer.

A mighty crowd was upon the wharf and saw them off. Frank was obliged to show himself and was cheered to the echo.

Then the steamer dropped away from the pier, swung out into the stream, and the journey to the Land of Fire was begun.

CHAPTER II. OVER THE PAMPAS.

THE scene of our story is now transposed to the rock bound and forbidding coast of Patagonia.

Little is known, even at this late day, of certain portions of this distant part of the earth.

Its people and its products are little familiar to the world at large.

Frank Reade, Jr., could not have selected a wider or better field.

Before they would again see civilization, the voyagers were destined to experience many thrilling adventures.

We will not dwell upon the voyage of the May Star, the steamer which carried our South American voyagers.

It was an uneventful one.

In due course of time the Equator was crossed, and they were under the Southern Cross.

Then gradually the South American coast was followed until below the Argentine.

Then one day the lookout on the cross tree shouted:

"Land ho!"

It was the Patagonian coast at last, and all were on deck eagerly viewing it.

According to the chart, the landing place was to be at the mouth of the Gregaris river.

This was sighted an hour or two later.

Then the steamer stood in to a little bay, which was circled partly by a white sandy beach.

Back of it were precipitous cliffs, fringed with a growth of stunted trees.

The steamer dropped anchor, and the work of disembarkation began.

In a short while all the different sections of the Turret had been transferred to the shore.

Along with him on the steamer, Frank had brought skilled workmen.

These now proceeded to put the parts of the machine together.

The material was all conveyed to the summit of the cliffs.

Beyond there could be seen the vast and mighty stretch of the Pampas.

The entire region presented a vastly different aspect than what our voyagers had been led to expect.

The air was dry and hot, the heavens had a lurid, burning hue and there seemed ever present a peculiar smoke-like vapor in the air.

Truly it seemed as if this was rightly named the Land of Fire.

Yet the spirits of all were high.

There was a certain indefinable charm in the thought that they were about to explore a wild and unknown tract of country.

Barney and Pomp worked like beavers.

The Turret was rapidly put together, and then began the work of moving stores from the steamer.

This was done by means of repeated trips with the boats.

At length, however, all this was accomplished in full.

The Turret was ready for her thousand mile trip, and the steamer blew her whistle in token of appreciation.

Frank Reade, Jr., shook hands with the captain.

"Now we are off!" he cried. "Captain you know when to return for us?"

"About the middle of September?"

"Yes."

"I will certainly be here."

"All right!"

The steamer crew waved their caps and cheered lustily.

Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp sprang aboard the Turret.

They responded to the farewell greetings of their friends, and then Frank pressed the electric lever which set the Turret's machinery in motion.

Like a thing of life the Turret glided gracefully forward.

Gradually she gained speed.

The plain was smooth and hard, and she had no difficulty in getting up a terrific rate of speed.

The steamer's crew stood upon the cliffs and watched the Turret until she was far out of sight.

Then they returned to the steamer.

A few moments later she had left the bay and was far out to sea.

Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp in the Electric Turret were in the Land of Fire, a barbarous and unexplored region, many thousand miles from home, and effectually cut off from all intercourse with friends.

It was a thrilling thing to think of. But the bold explorers gave it little heed.

The dangers of the trip had been well considered and accepted by them before making the start.

On went the Turret over the level plains.

The sea line soon faded in the distance, and now the country began to undergo a change.

Low lying on the inland horizon was a line of blue mist.

It seemed to hang there like a wall of mystery, shutting out possible wonders beyond.

"Begorra, that's a quare lukin' soight!" declared Barney.

"Yo' am right, I'ish," said Pomp. "I jes' flinks dat am some kin' ob a storm comin' dis yer way!"

"I rather think not," said Frank, studying it awhile. "It is very likely a peculiar condition of the atmosphere."

About upon every hand lay the boundless plain.

It was, as far as could be seen, remarkably free from the long pampas grass which would have clogged the wheels of the Turret had it not been for the keen, scythe-like knives with which Frank had provided it for this very purpose.

The plain had the appearance of having been burned over not long since.

Short, succulent grass was just sprouting up in good shape.

Over this smooth surface of course the Turret could thunder at a terrific speed.

The hours passed and the machine had covered a great distance.

Frank looked at the dial and saw that fully one hundred miles were they now from the sea coast.

Thus far they had seen no sign of life.

Only the boundless plain upon either side met the view.

But now Barney, who was on the forward deck, cried:

"Whisht now, Misther Frank, wud yez luk at that."

"What is it, Barney?" cried Frank, leaning out of the pilot-house window.

"Sture, sor, an' that is phwat I'd loike to know for meself."

Frank gazed in the direction indicated by the Celt.

Far out over the plain he beheld a long moving line.

At first it looked only like a little break in the level of the prairie floor.

But a closer scrutiny showed beyond any doubt that the line was moving.

The young inventor was interested.

What was it?

He picked up a long range glass, and lashing the wheel, went out on deck.

"What do you make of it, Barney?"

"Shure, sor, I don't know that."

Frank studied the line for some moments through the glass. Then he exclaimed excitedly:

"Upon my word, it is a troop of wild horses, or tamed ones, with Indian riders."

"Injuns, am it, sah?" cried Pomp, excitedly. "I jes fink I bettah get mah rifle."

"Begorra, yez had betther go insoide an' sthay there!" said Barney, with cruel sarcasm.

"Huh! yo' fink I'se 'fraid, does yo', chile?"

"Well, take it that way, if yez loikes."

"Don' yo' fool yo'self one lily bit. If yo' fink so, jes yo' tackle dis chile, dat am all I'se gwine fo' to say."

With which threat Pomp disappeared inside the Turret.

Frank had meanwhile been busily engaged in watching the distant foe.

For that there would be a foe there was little doubt.

In this particular locality there might be expected to be found the savage Auracanian or Red Indians.

They were the natural foe of the white men.

Frank, of course, did not experience any thrill of fear.

He knew that they could easily handle any number of the barbarians.

Yet the young inventor was not reckless.

He was not disposed to court any conflict with the Red Indians.

If they did not molest him, all well and good.

If they should, then they must suffer the consequences.

Of course the armament of the Turret would be too heavy for the Indians to safely face.

Frank knew this well.

Every moment now the galloping line drew nearer.

Frank made no move to change the course of the Turret.

Straight toward the Indians it thundered on.

There was a grim smile upon the young inventor's face, as he regarded the keen knives upon the hubs of the machine.

"They had better not attack the Turret!" he muttered. "Surely they will have better sense than that."

So swiftly were the Red Indians riding that they soon came in near view.

They were something like two hundred in number, and as savage-looking set of human beings as ever the sun shone on.

Stalwart, dark-skinned fellows they were, half clad in puma and guanaco skins.

They wore ostrich plumes in their hair and painted their faces.

They came bearing down upon the turret in a cloud.

It looked for a moment as if they would ride down upon it.

But suddenly, with a movement of the reins they turned their horses aside and went circling about the Turret.

All the while they filled the air with surprised yells and grunts.

"It is evident that they don't know what to make of this," said Frank, with an amused smile.

"Dat am a fac', Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

"Bejabers, I'd loike to grathify their curiosity wid a bit av cold lead!" said Barney.

"No, no!" cried Frank, "you must not fire at them."

The Turret had come to a halt.

Frank awaited some friendly action upon the part of the Indians.

But they continued to ride furiously about the Turret.

And all the while they kept up a furious yelling and whooping.

They were armed in a primitive way with lances, bows and arrows, and battle clubs.

A shower of arrows came rattling harmlessly against the steel sides of the Turret.

Then suddenly, as if by concerted action, the Auracanians made a mad dash at the Turret.

So sudden was it that the voyagers had no time to act.

The savages swarmed down upon the Turret like mad hornets.

Forcing their horses alongside, they even leaped from their backs to the deck.

CHAPTER III.

A FIGHT WITH THE INDIANS.

THIS settled all doubt in Frank's mind as to the hostile intentions of the Patagonian savages.

He had refrained from firing heretofore on account of this doubt.

The young inventor disliked to shed human blood.

But it now speedily became evident to him that he must overcome this repugnance or harm would result.

The natives were assailing the Turret with their heavy battle clubs.

Blow after blow they rained upon the steel shell of the machine.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, "I done fink dem rascals gwine to brek de masheen all to pieces!"

"Well, I think they will if we don't act quickly," said Frank.

With which he pressed the electric lever and set the machinery in motion.

The Turret started forward with great speed.

The result was comical as well as most exciting.

The Auracanians were hurled right and left and crushed beneath the wheels.

The keen knives upon the hubs literally cut their way through the mass of human beings.

Yet the Red Indians proved that they were not cowards.

They fought savagely, making every effort to arrest the progress of the Turret.

Great numbers of them were thrown under the wheels, or cut up by the knives. Still they clung on.

But the speed and weight of the Turret soon enabled it to clear the mass.

Clear of the throng it ran and out upon the plain.

The savages might as well have tried to catch a lightning bolt.

They came rushing after the Turret in a body.

But Frank opened the valve wide and let the Turret out for a fifty mile clip.

As fast as a railroad train it thundered across the plain.

The scrub ponies of the Indians were quickly distanced.

They were quickly compelled to give up the chase. In a very short space of time our voyagers were out of danger.

They now laughed heartily at the result of the affair.

"Bejabers, I niver saw the beat av it!" cried Barney. "Shure, the spalpeens were big fools to iver thry sich a game on the Turret. They niver cud howld it!"

"Yet I think we need not wholly despise the foe," said Frank Reade, Jr. "They could have done us harm if we had not cleared them."

"Shure, sor, I'll niver dispute that," said Barney. "Be me sowl, I'm a liar if they ain't rethreating now as fast as iver they can."

This was true.

The Auracanians were riding as if pursued by an evil spirit to the westward.

Soon they became but a mere speck upon the horizon.

It was evident that they had abandoned the chase.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not so foolish as to believe that he had seen the last of them.

The Turret now was proceeding at a fair rate of speed.

A dark body now rose up out of the pampas just ahead.

Frank studied it long enough to make sure that it was a rise of land; not exactly a range of hills, but slight mounds in the surface of the level plain.

He determined to head the Turret for this.

The day was fast drawing to a close.

In the west the sky was assuming the beautiful colors of a gorgeous sunset.

"Wha' am dat jus' ahead, Marse Frank?" asked Pomp.

"I am sure I cannot imagine," replied the young inventor. "We will very soon find out, however."

"Bejabers, it luks to me loike a big pile av rocks!" declared Barney.

"It may be that."

Frank put on the full force of the current, and the Turret shot ahead.

The intervening distance was quickly cleared.

But just before the undulating mounds were reached, a clump of tall pampas grass was noticed to the left.

This covered but a few acres, but as the party approached, from its cover there sprang forth a half hundred timid guanacos, a species of antelope.

These raced into a clump of beechwood just beyond, and were gone from sight.

The guanaco is a beautiful little animal, common in Patagonia, and prized for its sweet flesh.

At once Frank's desire for a hunt was aroused.

"Hi, hi!" cried Pomp. "Wha' sort ob critters am dem, Marse Frank?"

"Those are guanacos," replied Frank, quickly. "And they are beauties, too. I believe I'll try a chase for them!"

He went into the turret, and came out with a rifle.

"Bejabers, av yez do that, Masther Frank, some av the Injuns will be down on us agin!" declared Barney.

"I am not afraid of it," declared Frank, confidently. "Barney, you stay aboard and keep a good watch. Pomp, get your rifle and come along with me!"

Nothing could have suited Pomp better than this.

Either of the servitors would jump out of his skin any time to accompany Frank Reade, Jr.

Barney, however, did not demur. Pomp was quickly ready.

Leaving the Turret in Barney's care, Frank climbed the nearest mound.

It happened to be the highest, and he was able to look down upon the others.

As he gained the summit and looked about him he was given a mighty start.

"By gracious!" he ejaculated. "As I live, I believe this was the site of a city at one time!"

"Golly, Marse Frank!" exclaimed Pomp. "Wha' ebber makes yo' fink dat?"

"Is it not easy to see?" exclaimed the young inventor. "Look at that line younder. It evidently marks the city's street and from it are others. These grass grown mounds are heaps of ruins grown over in course of time by grass."

Indeed there was no doubt but that the young inventor was right.

To the eastward was a vast grove of beeches with a stream running through its shady glens.

A little south of that was a vast area of pampas grass which had in some manner escaped the fire.

The mounds which marked the ruined city were hundreds in number and of all shapes and sizes.

In places the grass had failed to cover the brick and stone of the ruins.

Avenues and streets were to be seen extending in every direction. But in all that vast area once occupied by the unknown city there was not left standing one single building.

All had gone to ruin long ago.

It was with curious reflections that Frank gazed upon the scene.

Was not here reasonable proof that a powerful and civilized people had once lived in Patagonia?

How long since this city had been occupied by a prosperous and thriving people there was no way of guessing.

It might have been a thousand years.

However this might be here was the undisputable proof that the city had once existed.

That it had been a large and beautiful place was also certain.

Frank reckoned roughly an estimate of ninety or one hundred thousand for a population.

Forgetting his guanaco hunt for the moment he walked down among the mounds.

He could see that time had covered the ruins with a drift of sub-soil, and that the grass which was everywhere had done its best to further conceal the evidence of human work.

Frank selected a soft place in one of the mounds and kicked away the dirt.

To his surprise quite a large section of it caved in.

He narrowly escaped falling into a cavity, the depth of which he had no means of knowing.

Imbued with a powerful curiosity Frank lay down flat upon his stomach and peered down into the place.

All was darkness.

He could not see the bottom of the cavity.

He let a pebble drop and heard it fall upon some hard substance at a depth which he estimated to be twenty-five feet.

"Mah soul, Marse Fraak!" cried Pomp, "Don' yo' go too near to dat hole, sah, or yo' is gwine to fall in suah."

"I'll look out for that, Pomp."

"Wha'ebber am it gwine to, sah?"

"I don't know, Pomp. I guess not to the center of the earth."

"Den yo' fink dar was a big city yer onct?"

"Yes, I do."

"Sho! Whar am de people?"

"Probably dead and gone, just as the city has gone."

"Huh! dat am bery queer."

"But we will stop now to explore it," said Frank. "Let us go after the guanacos. After the hunt we will see what can be done."

"A'right, sah."

Accordingly the mounds were left to the right, and the two hunters passed on to the growth of beechwood.

Here they proceeded more stealthily in the cover of the pampas grass.

Frank led the way.

For some while they crept on thus.

Then suddenly Frank paused.

"Easy, Pomp," he said. "There is the game just ahead."

The darky stood still.

Sure enough, not more than one hundred yards ahead was easily seen a number of the guanaco.

They were browsing quietly on the succulent grass.

Frank raised his rifle, at the same time saying:

"Take the one to the left, Pomp."

"A'right, sah."

There was a quick and deadly aim. Then came the report.

Crack—ack!

The two rifles spoke together.

And not without effect either.

Two of the guanacos fell.

The rest scampered away like the wind. In a moment Frank and Pomp had reached their game.

Two beautiful specimens of the guanaco lay before them.

Pomp at once proceeded to skin and cut them up.

Their meat is highly prized in Patagonia, and Frank was anxious to secure a stock of it.

But the hunt was not over.

Down in the glen by the river there were immense flocks of ducks. Every kind and species were represented.

The young inventor started thither, but was restrained by a warning cry which burst from Pomp.

"Fo' de Lor's sake jes' yo' look out dar, Marse Frank!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PUMA.

In an instant Frank Reade, Jr., sprang back.

"What is the matter with you, Pomp?" he cried, hastily.

The darky had retreated in terror to a mound near, and held his rifle ready cocked in his hand.

"Good Lor', Marse Frank, jes' cast yo' eyes ober yender to de edge ob dat grass! Ki dar! it am gwine to come an' gobble us all up jes' like de chillun ob Israel!"

The darky was in abject terror.

Frank was puzzled.

But he quickly swept the vicinity with a keen gaze, and then he saw the cause of the negro's alarm.

He was to be excused.

There just in the verge of the pampas jungle was a huge, tawny yellow monster.

His proportions were enormous, and his savage looks enough to terrify the bravest of men.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Frank. "It is a puma!"

This was the truth.

A puma of the most savage species was the animal in question and the cause of Pomp's fright.

For a moment Frank gazed at the monster in a cool manner.

The young inventor was an utter stranger to fear.

But certainly there was something terrifying in the facing of this cruel monster with its powerful jaws and claws.

Then slowly Frank began to retreat to the cover of a huge beech-wood near.

"Keep cool, Pomp!" he said in a low tone. "Do what I tell you."

"A' right, sah!" replied the darky, who was trembling like an aspen.

"I will fire first. If my shot does not take effect and the monster attacks us before I can reload, fire again!"

"Yes, sah!"

Frank raised his rifle and his eye glanced along the sight.

He took careful and steady aim.

The puma was glaring at him and lashing its long tail.

Frank aimed for the animal's shoulder in the hope of piercing the heart.

If he could succeed in doing this he would have the animal at his mercy.

There was a moment of hesitation and then Frank pulled the trigger.

Crack!

A terrible roar went up on the air, and Frank saw a yellow body come hurtling through the air towards him.

Never in his life had the young inventor felt more keenly the presence of deadly peril.

"Fire, Pomp!" he had presence of mind enough to shout.

And just in time Pomp fired.

Crack!

The monster struck the ground ten feet in front of Frank.

He tumbled in a heap, turning a somersault, and slid along the ground for several feet with the impetus of his rush.

But he was dead.

Straight to the heart Pomp's bullet had gone.

In an instant the darky's terror was gone.

He rushed forward, wildly crying:

"Golly fo' glory, Marse Frank, he am done killed fo' suah. Amn't dat jes' good luck?"

"You're right on that score, Pomp," said Frank, earnestly. "I thought my end had come."

There was some thought of removing the puma's skin.

But a closer examination showed that it was mangy and worthless. So it was not done.

Frank now thought only of returning to the Turret.

The guanaco meat was packed and carried along with them.

A little while later they emerged upon the plain and saw the Turret not a quarter of a mile distant.

Barney was on the outlook for them, and came bearing down at full speed.

A few moments later they were on board the Turret.

Pomp told the story of their adventures with gusto.

Barney listened with tingling veins.

"Bejabbers, it's meself that will go wid Misther Frank next time," he said. "Yez have had yer turn, naygur!"

"A'right," agreed Pomp. "If yo' had been dar, dat big lion wud hab eat yo' all up."

"Begorra, there's two moinds an' that point!" declared Barney, hotly.

As darkness was now at hand Frank was determined to remain over night upon the spot.

Accordingly preparations were made to that end.

The electric search-light was turned on, and as the darkness increased this lit up the vicinity far and near.

Frank was determined to explore the ruined city the next day.

Particularly he was desirous of descending into the aperture in the mound which he had discovered.

He was of a firm belief that he would make some wonderful discovery.

So he anxiously awaited the coming of day again.

But the night was destined to hold adventures of a most thrilling sort.

Everything was made shipshape for the night.

It was arranged that Barney and Pomp should alternate as watchers.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was a light sleeper, so on the whole they had little fear of a surprise.

About ten o'clock Frank turned in to get some sleep.

This left Barney on guard while Pomp was sleeping, having retired much earlier.

The night was as black as pitch.

Objects could hardly be seen a foot distant, and the search-light was closed, as Frank did not like to waste the current necessary to run it.

Barney was plucky enough, but as he patrolled the deck of the Turret upon this night, he felt a trifle queer.

In that lonely savage wilderness, with such a veil of darkness about him, it was not surprising.

The Celt in broad daylight and in plain view of an enemy, was as brave as a lion.

But in such darkness as this, and with the superstitious fears of his nature aroused, he was far different.

So as he patrolled the deck with the rifle at his shoulder, he would look about him fearfully.

Every dark shadow suggested a foe, every distant wailing cry of night bird or animal called to mind the banshee.

So he shivered and drew himself up with a tautening of nerves.

"Begorra, it's the haythin's own land, this is," he muttered to himself. "Divil a bit do I loike it at all, at all."

But he would not have deserted his post though he had really been confronted by a genuine ghost.

His sense of duty was too strong for this.

Time passed slowly.

It seemed to Barney that he must have worn a literal path on the deck of the Turret so many times had he crossed it.

Thus matters were when suddenly the Celt beheld a strange sight. From the distance there flashed a star of light.

It seemed in the direction of the mound city.

The Celt stood still and watched it for some moments.

It seemed to dance up and down and flicker wildly.

He was puzzled.

"Phwat the divil wud yez call that?" he muttered.

The light was suddenly joined by another. They might have been ignis fatui judging from their actions.

The Celt was completely mystified.

"Howly Mither, preserve us!" he gasped. "It's the wurruk av the divil an' his legions. It's dead we'll all be ferninst another day!"

So certain was he of this premise that Barney began to mumble prayers and cross himself devoutly.

But even as he was doing this another light appeared.

A fourth came, and a fifth, then others, and rapidly a very legion of them made their appearance.

This was perplexing enough.

But the Celt's superstition began to vanish at this point.

His natural common sense began to come to his aid.

"Begorra, that's not so funny as it might be!" he muttered.

"Shure, an' mebbe them be tarches carried by a lot av thim red-skinned omadhouns. Faith, I'll soon find out!"

The Celt started for the pilot-house.

His intention was to turn on the search-light and investigate the matter.

But before he reached the pilot-house, over the rail there came tumbling a legion of acrobatic forms.

It was dark as pitch, and Barney could see them but indistinctly, yet he knew that they were Indians.

In an instant he let out a yell to wake the dead.

"Howly St. Patrick! Up wid yez, ivery man. Shure, the inemy have come at last. On deck, ivery man!"

Then he discharged his rifle.

With a terrible yell one of the Indians went over the rail.

But the others came on like a whirlwind.

There was no time to lose.

For an instant Barney gave the battle up as lost. Then his dogged spirit was thoroughly aroused.

"Bejabers, they'll niver take the Turret while Barney O'Shea is alive."

The Celt made a spring for the pilot-house door.

A Red Indian had already reached it.

But the Celt struck him down with the butt of his gun and then rushed into the place.

The steel door shut behind him with a snap.

He touched a spring, and all the shutters aboard the Turret were closed.

Then the Celt reached the search-light and turned it on.

At this moment Frank and Pomp appeared on the scene.

They had tumbled out of bed and were only partly dressed.

"What is the matter, Barney?" asked Frank, excitedly. "Are we attacked?"

"We are, sor," replied the Celt. "Bad cess to the omadhouns."

"Then hold steady."

Frank sprang to the keyboard.

He glanced out of the pilot-house window as he did so.

The glare of the electric lights dispelled the gloom, and he saw the situation at a glance.

The Red Indians were all about the Turret in a swarm.

They were vainly trying to effect an entrance to the turret.

The steel doors, however, resisted them. Their stone axes made no impression at all upon the hard steel.

Frank smiled grimly, and pulled open a certain lever on the keyboard which was marked 57.

CHAPTER V.

FIGHTING THE SAVAGES.

BEFORE going further, it might be well to mention the fact that the interior shell of the Turret was insulated.

That is to say, there was a wall of thick rubber between the outer and the inner steel walls.

The purpose of this was a most adroit one.

The outer shell was connected by a network of wires with the dynamos.

When the current was turned on, the entire outer shell and steel deck was heavily charged.

Contact with this was the most disastrous for any human being.

When Frank pulled open lever 57, therefore, he charged the outer shell heavily.

The result was thrilling.

Every barbarian on the deck was given a terrible shock.

Nothing could withstand such a thing.

They were prostrated in heaps and in many cases hurled from the deck as if with giant hands.

It was safe to say that none of them had ever indulged in such an experience before. Many of them would never again.

For the force of the current was fully three thousand volts and enough in many cases to instantly kill a man.

More of the barbarians were piling forward as if to invade the deck. But the moment one came in contact with the steel railing, he was a sorry savage instantly.

The attacking body of barbarians were hurled back as effectually as if by the hands of Jove.

Then Frank started the Turret forward.

He was resolved to change his position, and clearing the crowd of assailants Frank started the Turret out onto the plain.

It ran well and fast for a half mile. Then Frank was satisfied that they were clear of the savage gang.

He had turned off the current which charged the shell of the Turret.

Upon the deck there was a heap of the attacking natives.

Some were dead and others unconscious. By Frank's orders Barney and Pomp went out and dumped them unceremoniously off upon the floor of the prairie.

The flashing of lights could be seen about the spot they had just left.

The excited adventurers now had time for an interchange of opinions.

Barney told his story succinctly.

"Then you did not really understand what those lights were when you saw them?" asked Frank.

"No sor. I did not!" replied the Celt. "Divil a bit av it. But I knew whin I see the divils coming over the rail!"

"Well," said Frank, drawing a deep breath. "We've whipped them but it is no telling how serious it might have been for us had they got into the Turret!"

"Bejabers they'd niver have done that while I was alive!" declared Barney.

"I hardly know what to do!" said Frank. "If they attempt to attack us again I think I'll give them a ball from the electric gun!"

"Shure sor, an' yez'll have to do that same!" cried Barney.

The Celt pointed into the gloom.

He was right.

There advancing down upon the Turret plainly visible in the search light's glare was a body of several hundred of the foe.

Frank was perplexed.

He was averse to taking human life.

He hated much to sweep these ignorant beings out of existence. It was plain that they did not know what they were doing.

But yet there seemed no other way.

It was certainly an act of self-defense. Then an idea occurred to the young inventor.

He would try the effect of a scare upon them.

Thus far this had not worked.

But now, if he could make it effective enough, he believed it would tell. So he decided upon it.

He went into the turret and touched a spring.

The turret revolved until the electric gun was brought to bear upon the approaching throng.

Then he sighted it.

But he took good care not to aim it directly at the Red Indians.

He made a line upon a knoll just before them and then opened the pneumatic tube of the gun.

Instantly the air was exhausted.

It was but a moment's work to put in the explosive projectile.

Then he closed the breech and twisted the percussion wire with the dynamo wire. All this took but a few seconds.

Then Frank pressed an electric key.

The pneumatic chamber expanded, there was a hissing of air and like a thunderbolt the projectile was hurled from the gun.

It traveled down toward the foe as swift as thought.

Almost instantly there was a flash of light against the knoll, a terrific roar and into the air there rose a mighty column of sand and flames.

A few seconds later the commotion had subsided.

And there right in the path of the attacking Indians there was erected a mound of earth and debris fully ten feet high.

It was an astounding exhibition of explosive power.

The natives, terrified beyond all measure, started away in wild retreat.

The experience with the Electric Turret was a bitter pill with them. In a twinkling they were out of sight in the darkness.

"Bejabers, that will open their eyes a bit, I'm thinkin'," declared Barney.

"It ought to," agreed Frank; "but these savages are such an ignorant class that it is hard to tell about that."

Frank waited for some while for the savages to appear again. But they did not do so. It began to look for a certainty as if they had really enough of the battle.

Resolved to satisfy himself upon this point Frank started the Turret around the mound city.

With the search-light to illuminate the vicinity it was easy enough to see the way about.

The Turret coasted about the vicinity for some while.

But not a trace of the natives was to be found.

They had disappeared absolutely from the vicinity.

The lesson given them had proved a terrible one. They had no desire to again try conclusions with the white men.

Where they had gone it was not easy to guess.

Frank guessed perhaps correctly that they had sought the cover of the jungle. Certain it was nothing more was seen of them that night.

But there was no more sleep for the voyagers.

They were glad enough to welcome the light of day breaking in the east.

As soon as daylight appeared, preparations were made for the morning meal.

All were hungry, and the juicy guanaco meat, roasted over hot coals, made a most appetizing dish.

When all had partook of this to their heart's content, Frank took his rifle and said:

"Come, Barney, this time it is your turn. Let us explore that mound."

The Celt was delighted.

"All roight, sor!" he cried.

He picked up his rifle and followed Frank with alacrity.

The young inventor was desirous of thoroughly exploring the city of mounds.

He believed that much of scientific value might be discovered there. With Barney accompanying him he undertook the task.

Pomp made no demur.

The darky was quite willing to remain aboard the Turret.

He had enjoyed his turn at it the day previous, and he was not by any means selfish.

Frank had no difficulty in finding the mound which he had broken into the day before.

The cavity yawned at his feet, but so far as guessing what the place contained he was as much at sea as ever.

He had brought with him, however, a lantern and rope.

These he laid down upon the ground at the mouth of the cavity and said:

"Now, Barney, I am going down into that place. I want you to lower me on the rope and haul me up when I give you the signal!"

The Celt bowed.

"All roight, sor!" he said, readily. "I'll do jist as yez say. Divil a bit different."

"That is the way to talk!"

Frank tossed one end of the rope into the cavity.

The other end he gave to Barney.

The Celt braced himself and Frank prepared to descend.

As he slowly slid down the rope, the light of the lantern did much toward making the mystery clear.

Frank saw about him the cornices and carved reliefs of a wonderful ceiling, the style of architecture being entirely new.

The young inventor surveyed this with interest.

"The former occupants of this place certainly had a good taste for fine art," he muttered. "They must have been highly civilized."

The more he pondered upon the matter, the better satisfied he became that this was so.

Down into the buried house Frank was lowered slowly.

Soon his feet struck the floor.

He unloosed the rope and stood in the wonderful chamber underground.

Above him was a round circle of daylight, but otherwise it was not difficult for him to realize that he was underground.

"Are yez all roight, sor?" came Barney's voice down the shaft.

"Yes, Barney!" replied the young inventor.

"Well, sor, phwat sort av a place can it be down there?"

"I will tell you very shortly," replied Frank. "I have not yet found out for myself."

This satisfied Barney.

"All right, sor," he replied.

Frank now proceeded to examine the underground chamber with care.

Its walls and ceilings were those of an ordinary house of the ancient Roman period.

Indeed, the style of architecture of the columns and bases which supported the roof was much after the Roman.

Frank continued his exploration with deep interest.

The floor was of paved tiles and arranged somewhat in Mosaic pattern.

But the chamber was utterly devoid of anything like furniture or statuary or like objects.

Whether it had ever contained anything of this sort or not, it was not easy to hazard a guess.

Neither were there any skeletons or human remains to be seen. Yet it was certain that human hands had built these walls.

Frank discovered that a door led into another room, and in the hope of finding something there which was more explanative, he passed through it.

And as his lantern broke the utter gloom beyond he stood absolutely enchained with wonderment.

Never in his life had it been his good fortune to gaze upon so wonderful a scene as this.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAVELERS.

FRANK READE, JR., was for a moment appalled with the spectacle which burst upon his vision.

A mighty banquet hall lay stretched in columned vistas before him. Great columns, rudely carved, extended in a long line down its entire length.

Beneath the roof supported by these was an immense banquet table, with what actually seemed like a bountiful repast waiting for hungry eaters.

A long row of chairs extended upon either side of the table.

In each of these chairs sat a ghastly, grinning skeleton. Nothing was left of flesh or vestment, but the crumbling bones were all.

Upon the table were great flagons, mighty urns and vast bowls, with drinking cups of silver and gold and horn.

Great candelabras of brass were at intervals along the table.

It had been a mighty feast apparently, with only Death to preside.

Frank gazed upon the scene with something like a sickening sense of horror.

It was like he had never seen or heard of before.

"Upon my word," he muttered. "What an assemblage this was. What terrible stroke of death was visited upon them in this summary manner to leave them all here like this."

Certainly it must have been a fearful and sudden death stroke which had struck the assemblage.

None seemed to have left their seats indicating a desire to escape. What did it mean?

Frank was puzzled.

He overcame a sense of horror sufficiently to advance to the table.

He sent the rays of his electric lantern down the length of the table.

Whether it was the effect of the light or the commotion of the atmosphere by his appearance, it was not easy to say, but some of the bones crumbled into dust.

This showed great antiquity.

They had been here no doubt several hundred years at least.

At this juncture Frank picked up one of the silver mugs.

He examined it closely when he received a powerful shock.

There, upon the surface, he saw plainly a crest and arms.

The latter were the arms of Spain.

Below it was the date 1590.

Like a great wave the revelation came to Frank Reade, Jr.

"Ah!" he cried. "At last I have it. I have found a Spanish city, founded in this wild country by that early spirit of exploration and discovery which led Columbus to dare the unknown ocean westward."

This was true.

The city of mounds was really the relic of a mighty effort of Spanish colonists to found an empire on American soil.

The city had been built perhaps one hundred years after the voyage of Columbus.

It was a powerful thing to think upon.

Frank gazed upon the scene before him with a deep thrill.

But all this, however, did not explain the mystery of the death of the banqueters seemingly all at once.

Nor was he to find any sort of a key to this problem.

Search as he would Frank could not solve it.

He was obliged to abandon it.

This banquet hall and the room by which he had entered were the only chambers in the vast palace, which the building must have been, not filled with earth and debris.

Frank took several of the silver and gold flagons and an antique sword with a diamond studded handle and started on the return.

When he arrived at the aperture he found Barney in waiting.

"All right, Barney. Pull away!" he cried, adjusting the noose about him.

"I will, sor!"

The Celt did pull away.

And with such success that Frank was soon once more on level ground.

"Shure, sor, an' phwat have yez there?" cried the Celt, in amazement.

Frank then told the story of his discoveries in the banquet hall.

Barney listened in wonderment.

"Shure, sor, that is very quare!" he cried. "Don't yez mane to return and hunt further?"

"I think not!" replied Frank. "I don't believe it will result in any advantage to us. We will go on to new explorations, for our stay in Patagonia is brief."

"Very well, sor!"

"You know we want to find the giants and visit the southern spur of the Andes."

"Yis sor."

"I will, however, take the exact latitude and longitude of this place so that if we desire we may visit it again!"

Barney did not demur. Frank was the boss and he had nothing to say.

The young inventor returned to the Turret at once.

Then he proceeded to note the bearings of the buried city.

"Whew!" he muttered, as he mentally surveyed the vast collection of mounds. "What a treasure this would be to certain enthusiastic scientists and antiquarians!"

He put away his note book and went into the pilot house.

Frank was in earnest in his intention to leave the spot.

A beautiful day was breaking overhead. A few moments later, the Turret was once more under full head racing across the pampas.

The country now began to undergo a material change.

It was still the same low, level plain, but the grass stood in some places ten feet high.

It was with difficulty that their course could be seen from the pilot-house.

It was like swimming in a vast sea of white cotton, for the pampas grass was ripe and its pollen hung in great quantities from the stem.

An ordinary wagon would have found progress slow.

But the Turret had been provided with keen knives upon the hubs and axles, which cut the grass like cheese.

This left a broad pathway wherever the Turret went.

For hours the machine went on in this fashion.

There seemed literally no end to the mighty waste.

Barney and Pomp were on deck engaged in various duties.

Frank was in the pilot-house.

At every step, wild game sprang from the grass in the shape of rabbits or wild birds.

Occasionally a shot was tried at these, but not much time was thus lost.

Frank was keenly desirous of getting to the other end of the plain as quickly as possible.

He was alive to the fact that this was one of the most perilous of journeys.

The reason was apparent in the fact that they were in the very heart of the Land of Fire.

It was the burning of these mighty wastes of tall grass which had given to the region the name above.

Even now in the far distance the long line of smoke and flames of a fire could be seen.

Seldom in Patagonia is one out of sight of one of these mighty conflagrations.

Nothing can stand in their course.

Sweeping across the plain they carry destruction in their van, and woe to the unlucky traveler thus overtaken. Sad indeed is his fate.

Frank knew this well.

Therefore he was upon the lookout.

Suddenly he spied an object just above the distant sea of white which gave him a start.

It was a man's head moving rapidly through the grass.

Soon Frank saw others.

Full half a dozen, as the young inventor believed, mounted men were approaching the Turret.

They wore broad palmetto hats and their features could not be plainly distinguished.

Frank instinctively made them out to be gauchos, a kind of Patagonian cowboy and herder.

He did not apprehend any trouble with such and therefore, when suddenly the foremost hailed the Turret Frank closed the lever.

Leaning out of the pilot house window he returned the hail.

To his surprise, back came in good English the terse query:

"Who the devil are you, and what have you got there?"

"Mercy preserve us!" cried Frank, in surprise. "Are you Englishmen?"

"Not by a durned sight. We are pure bred American Yankees!"

"Well, so am I."

"You are?"

"Yes!"

"That settles it. When we get up there we'll shake!"

"How many of you are there?"

"Six; three of us are Americans, and three are gauchos."

Frank gave quick orders to Barney and Pomp.

The Turret moved about in a circle until a large clearing had been made in the tall grass.

Into this the six horsemen rode.

As the spokesman had said, three were gauchos and three white men.

The latter now dismounted and at once fearlessly approached the Turret.

They regarded it with sheer wonderment, and the spokesman cried:

"I say, what kind of a rig do you call that?"

"This is the electric Turret," replied Frank, for the second time.

"The electric Turret?"

"Yes."

"Thunder and guns! Who is the inventor, I'd like to ask?"

"I am."

The three Americans gazed wonderingly at Frank.

Then they advanced and offered to shake hands. Frank responded cordially.

One of the Americans was short and thickset, wearing glasses, the second was tall and handsomely built, with a full beard, the third of medium height and distinguished in appearance.

All were intellectual and refined in manners, though blunt in speech, an American characteristic.

"I am Cecil Everhard," said the first one of the travelers. "This is my friend Chester Wayne, civil engineer, and Artemas Bent, professor of the sciences at Yale College."

"Indeed, I am glad to meet you, gentlemen," said Frank, warmly.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown, U. S. A."

They shook hands cordially.

"No doubt you may wonder what our mission in this region is," said Everhard.

"Well, yes," said Frank.

"We are here upon an exploring expedition in the interests of science."

"You could not have struck a richer field."

"So we all believe."

"I can vouch for that."

"We are looking up the peoples of this strange country and their manners and customs. I am an author and mean to write a book on the subject."

CHAPTER VII.

'MIDST FIRE AND SMOKE.

"WELL," said Frank Reade, Jr., warmly, "I hope you will have good success. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"We thank you very much. Perhaps you can tell us of the Andean giants?"

"I cannot," replied Frank. "I am now on my way to the Andes."

"So are we."

"Indeed!"

"May we ask what is your mission in Patagonia?"

"Certainly," replied Frank. "We are here simply for sport, adventure and any kind of exploration."

"How in the world did you ever get that machine down here?"

"It was brought by special steamer."

"You don't mean it? Is it bullet proof?"

"Yes."

"What is the motive power?"

"Electricity."

More catechism followed, until Frank invited the travelers aboard the Turret and showed them its mechanism.

They were wonderstruck and expressed their admiration in glowing terms.

"What a grand idea!" cried Everhard. "Surely, Mr. Reade, you are a wonderful man."

The others expressed themselves in like terms.

Frank, however, modestly disclaimed the title and said:

"Well, gentlemen, if you will hobble your horses and tarry here awhile we will try and give you a sample of Pomp's skill in the culinary art?"

"In other words an invitation to dine!" cried Wayne, gayly. "Indeed, Mr. Reade, if we will not be presuming upon your kindness—"

"Certainly not."

"To tell the truth, our living has been so poor since leaving home, that it will seem good to really get something that is toothsome."

All entered into the spirit of the occasion in high good humor.

Pomp, who was much flattered, did his part handsomely.

The travelers turned their horses out to graze, and a camp-fire was made in the clearing made by the keen scythe-like knives of the Turret.

It was a jovial meeting of kindred spirits in that far away part of the world.

Very soon a toothsome repast was being discussed by the company.

It was a pleasant social gathering, and in spite of the heat and some discomforts was thoroughly enjoyed.

Frank brought out wine and all drank to the success of the expedition.

After all was over Everhard advanced and gripped Frank's hand.

"Mr. Reade!" he said, warmly. "We are all indebted to you for this jolly time. Now we would like to humbly submit to you a proposal!"

"Very well!" said Frank.

"Our cause seems to be a common one. You are in quest of the giants and we the same!"

"That is true!"

"Why can we not combine our forces?"

There was a moment's silence. Then Frank replied:

"We can, at least, be traveling companions."

"That is what I mean."

"Good! We shall certainly be glad of your company."

And so it was arranged that the two exploring parties should proceed together.

It was decided to continue the journey without further delay. Accordingly the Turret started ahead.

But even as the machinery was put in motion a sudden gloom fell over the landscape.

In surprise all turned their heads to the eastward.

The sight they beheld was a most thrilling one. There had suddenly sprung up from the horizon a mighty black cloud which was fast spreading toward the zenith.

Below on the horizon line there was a livid line of fire.

"Fire! Fire!" cried Everhard in trumpet tones. "To saddle everybody. It is for our lives!"

This was a truthful utterance.

The lives of the party certainly depended upon quick action.

The entire world seemed on fire at that moment and the flames were coming with lightning-like speed toward the party of explorers.

Up to the very zenith swept the mighty cloud of smoke.

The progress of a pampas fire is very rapid indeed. Unless quick action is made few can get out of the way of the terrible flames which scorch and wither everything in their path. None realized this more keenly than Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor shouted:

"Come, Barney and Pomp! Get aboard lively now!"

The two faithful servitors were quick to obey. They were quickly in the Turret and Frank sprang into the pilot-house.

As Everherd sprang to saddle he shouted:

"Better go due south Mr. Reade. There is a wide burn there and if we can reach it we will be safe!"

Indeed it was hard enough to tell in which direction this was in the face of such a wall of smoke.

But Frank glanced at the compass.

"All right!" he replied, "Come along all of you!"

"We will," shouted Wayne.

And away went the Turret cutting a wide swathe through the dry grass.

Like a locomotive on a clear track the Turret ran on.

Fortunately the ground was quite smooth in spite of the deep grass, and Frank let the machine run wild.

On over the plain thundered the Turret.

The horses kept up with difficulty, yet did not seem to be giving out.

After the first two miles Frank realized that it would not do to run so fast.

He would certainly leave the others hopelessly behind.

He did not wish to do this.

So accordingly he slackened pace.

If it had been necessary he would have taken the three Americans aboard. The three gauchos had gone in a different direction, having quit the party immediately after the first meeting.

They no doubt were in safe quarters and far beyond the reach of the fire.

But now just when it became patent to Frank that the horses were going to be unable to outrun the fire a most thrilling thing happened.

A mighty great wave of smoke shut down over the party.

So thick and dense and overpowering was it that all seemed liable to suffocation.

What was worse, when it began to lift nothing was to be seen of the horsemen.

In the dense gloom they had become separated from the Turret.

Frank sent the searchlight's glare out into the smoke.

But it was of no use.

Nothing could be seen through the dense pall. Barney and Pomp went out on deck and shouted:

But all to no avail.

The horsemen were hopelessly separated from the Turret.

It was with a sense of horror that Frank realized this.

"My God!" he declared. "It will be the death of them."

"Golly! dey is jes' as good as cooked a'ready I reckon," said Pomp.

"Bejabers I'd rayther not be in their skin!" affirmed Barney.

The fire had been making tremendous headway.

It was now gaining fast.

Frank was in a terrible quandary.

He regretted now that he had not taken the three travelers aboard in the first place. Their fate seemed sealed.

But every moment endangered the Turret and their own lives.

Frank had brought the Turret down almost to a stop.

But, of course, every moment the flames were fast drawing nearer.

Time was valuable, and to hesitate was to be lost.

Self preservation is ever Nature's first law, and Frank yielded to a sense of his inability to succor the lost men.

So he sent the Turret ahead once more at full speed.

But now a new and terrible danger threatened.

Of course it was quite impossible to tell where the machine was going or what was ahead, on account of the dense smoke.

The course might be clear, or there might be some obstacle, which, if the Turret should crash into it would ruin it.

It was a blind course, and placed Frank in a predicament.

He dared not wait or turn back on account of the fire.

The way was no other way but to go ahead, or turn about and take the chances of dashing through the flames in safety.

For a moment Frank considered this latter plan.

But he abandoned it on account of its seeming lack of feasibility.

He pulled the electric lever wide open, the dynamos buzzed and the Turret shot like a meteor across the plain.

The blind race was on.

Frank had no idea what the end would be or where he would terminate the mad run.

On and on like a meteor fled the Turret through that smoke cloud.

The young inventor was in momentary hope that the Turret would emerge from the smoke cloud and that the course could be seen.

But strange to say the smoke only grew thicker.

More than this the air became suffocating hot, and Frank even fancied that he distinguished flames just ahead.

What did it mean?

Had the Turret changed its course and were they going really into the fire instead of away from it?

A fearful chill of horror struck Frank Reade, Jr.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, in terror. "I done fink we is gettin' into a bad fix. Wha' ebber shall we do?"

"Begorra, it's burned up intirely we'll be!" cried Barney.

But Frank only grimly held onto the steering wheel of the Turret and sent it ahead with increased speed.

"There is only just one way now!" he reflected. "And that is, to make a run for life!"

He looked at the compass and saw that the Turret was going due south.

This should have carried them away from the fire instead of into it.

But Frank guessed the truth which was that the fire had rapidly made a semicircle and the wind changing had brought it from this new quarter.

And every moment the Electric Turret was going deeper into the flames.

In a few moments it would be engulfed in that awful flame.

But Frank Reade, Jr. did not once lose his nerve.

He hung onto the Turret's wheel and kept her straight ahead. It was a trying moment. Would he succeed in his purpose?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIANT.

FRANK READE, JR., knew that the chances were against him.

The fire was intensely fierce, and it would require but brief exposure to ruin the machinery of the Turret.

But the best of luck sided with the Turret's party.

The machine plunged full head into the fire.

And as it happened this was at a point where the grass was thin, there being a gravelly bottom under it.

For one brief instant flames were all about the machine.

Frank Reade, Jr., in the pilot-house could see nothing ahead, but merely held onto the lever and kept his eyes on the compass.

The heat was something awful.

The glass in the pilot-house front seemed likely to break at any moment. The metal shell was creaking and straining as though about to burst.

But the only combustible thing on the outside of the machine was the flags.

They were consumed instantly.

One moment of awful suspense.

The Turret could hardly have been in the vortex of flames ten seconds.

Yet this was sufficient to instantly charge the air on the interior.

Then as if bursting from the depths of Hades the Turret emerged from the flames.

Sunlight was all around them, and a long, level, blackened plain lay before them as far of the eye could reach.

Scarcely a smoking ember could be seen in that expanse where the terrible heat had so quickly consumed all.

But the Turret was safe.

They had emerged as by an act of Providence from the clutches of grim death.

A wild cheer burst from the lips of Barney and Pomp.

"Bejabers, this is the toime we got out av a foine scrape!" cried Barney wildly. "Shure an' it's lucky we are."

"Huh! I done fink it would be no mo' dan yo' will come to some time, I'ish," declared Pomp, with a smirking grimace.

"Bejabers, I'm afther thinkin' yez will be me nearest neighbor," cried Barney.

"Huh! Yo' kin bet I won't. I don' mix wif no I'ish, I don'."

"Begorra, an' they're a shade better than naygurs," retorted Barney, hotly.

The two servitors would have had a friendly scrap then and there had it not been that other and more important matters just now claimed their attention.

The Turret was now running wild across the burned plain.

The course was now smooth and clear, and Frank turned the Turret so that it could follow the fire.

The young inventor now thought of the three Americans.

What had been their fate?

Had they perished in the flames or had they really made good their escape?

This was a mystery.

It was not easy to solve it.

Frank allowed the Turret to bear more to the northward now.

It was possible that if the flames overtook the Americans they might be able to break through the line safely.

So Frank kept a sharp lookout in the hopes of seeing them.

But this happy hope was not accorded him a fulfillment.

For miles the Turret kept on, but nothing was seen of the Americans.

All hope was given up of ever seeing them alive again.

Frank did not believe it possible that they could have made their escape from the flames.

The fire now surged away to the southward in huge masses of flame and smoke as high as the zenith.

Frank did not attempt to keep up with it.

He bore away to the westward now, and soon had reached the line of a previous burn, where the new grass, rich and succulent, was springing up.

Here there were plenty of guanacos and ostriches.

A number of the latter started up from their burrowing places in the sand and started across the plain.

The ostrich is a very fleet bird, as is well known, being able often to outrun the fleetest horse.

Barney, who was on the bridge, waved his arms and shouted:

"Bejabers, Mither Frank, phwat wud yez say to be afther catchin' wan av thim purty birruds?"

"All right!" replied Frank. "Go out and help him, Pomp!"

"A right, sah!" replied the dorky, who eagerly obeyed.

Out upon the deck Barney and Pomp scrambled in haste.

Frank sent the Turret after one of the finest of the ostriches.

And now began a race as exciting as it was wonderful.

The ostrich sped on at a terrific rate and after it came the Turret.

Of course the latter gained rapidly.

On a straight course it would very quickly have outrun the bird.

But the ostrich was tricky and suddenly turned like a flash and shot off in another direction.

Of course the Turret had to slacken speed and take a long sweep.

But Frank soon had the machine once more in close pursuit.

The ostrich again and again dodged but Frank kept up the same tactics.

The result of this soon became apparent.

The bird began to tire and now Barney brought out a long lariat, which he was expert in the art of throwing.

Just at the right moment he swung it over his head.

It went coiling and circling through the air and settled down over the bird's neck.

A quick pull and the game was bagged.

The ostrich struggled violently, but was soon captured and killed.

Its feathers were secured and the better part of its meat, which is very good eating.

This ended the ostrich hunt and Frank now headed the Turret due westward.

All that day they bowled on over the pampas.

Then just as night began to settle down, Barney, who was on the lookout, cried:

"Hurrah! On me worrud there is a mighty big hill!"

"A hill!" said Frank, with a laugh. "I should say it was!"

Barney took umbrage.

"Bejabers, an' phwat else would yez call it?" he asked.

"Why, it is a mountain," replied Frank.

"A mountain?"

"Sure!"

"Begorra, it luks only loike a hill."

"That is because of the distance and the rarity of the atmosphere. That is one of the Andean range."

"Yez don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do!"

"An' how far wud yez call it, sor?"

"It is fully one hundred miles distant."

"Faith, an' I'd niver belave it."

"It is the truth, nevertheless."

"An' do yez mean to go yender?"

"I do!"

"Shure, an' I s'pose we'll find thim giants over there?"

"Yes."

Barney had been from the first more than anxious to get a look at the Patagonian giants.

His curiosity was destined to be rewarded and that very soon.

The Turret kept on rapidly.

Before dark half the distance to the Andean range had been covered.

Travel was made by search-light, and by midnight the Turret was at the foot of the mighty range.

The country now underwent a change.

It became more rough and rocky.

There were great heaps of bowlders, mighty ledges, hills and hollows and dashing cascaded torrents.

But it was all a vastly beautiful region.

The forests were of beechwood and maple, with firs upon the mountain slopes.

There were beautiful glens, picturesque dells, and all manner of wonderful natural beauties.

For the first time now they came upon droves of wild horses.

Beautiful animals they were, as fleet as the wind, and as plump as the best of rich feed could make them.

Barney and Pomp had a great desire to make a hunt for them.

But Frank would not listen to this.

The young inventor was anxious to discover the valley in which it was said the city of the giants existed.

Slowly the Turret made its way through the deep glens, until at length higher ground was reached.

Now the pampas could be seen far below.

Stretching as smooth as a billiard table far to the horizon line, they certainly presented a remarkable spectacle.

For some time the voyagers rested upon a spur of the mountain wall and regarded them.

Then the journey was resumed.

They had come now to what seemed like a sort of a water shed extending along the mountain wall.

Beyond there were beautiful valleys.

In this region the Patagonian giants made a dwelling-place.

Suddenly Barney leaped down from the bridge, a trifle pale, and rushed into the pilot-house.

"Shure, Mither Frank!" he cried, "wud yez luk at that?"

"What?" asked Frank.

"Bejabers, sor, up yender on the mountain side!"

Frank's gaze went in the direction indicated. Truly it was a wonderful sight which he beheld.

There, high upon the mountain side, was the figure of a man.

But such a man.

He was of enormous stature, being fully eight or nine feet in height, with herculean proportions.

Never in their lives had the voyagers seen his equal.

For a moment they gazed upon him with a mixture of terror and awe.

That he was a savage was evident from his manner and dress.

He wore clothing rudely made of guanaco skins, and carried a tremendous battle club in his hands.

He seemed to be regarding the Turret with surprise.

Indeed he seemed to be fully as astonished to see it as the voyagers were to see him.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Frank Reade, Jr., "what a man that is!"

"Bejabers he'd make six av the loikes av us!" affirmed Barney.

"I done fink yo' bettah look out fo' him, Marse Frank."

Pomp's warning was not without good grounds. Indeed the giant was seen to angrily make gestures.

Then he swung his battle ax aloft and started down for the Turret.

It was evident that he meant to challenge these new invaders upon his territory.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GIANT RACE.

But Frank had not the slightest fear that the giant could do any harm whatever to the Turret.

Indeed he did not make a move to change the position of the machine.

The giant came down the mountain side with long loping strides.

Straight toward the Turret he came.

Frank waited until he was within fifty yards of the machine.

Then the giant halted.

His features were coarse and massive and the shape of his head low and brutal in every detail.

It was evident that he was one of the lower order of men.

He stood at that distance a towering, powerful specimen of manhood.

The voyagers regarded him with something like admiration and wonderment.

Frank's curiosity was aroused to see what move the fellow would make.

For a few moments the giant surveyed the Turret in silence.

He seemed unable to make out its character and its mission.

Suddenly the brutal force of his nature cropped out.

It has been claimed by certain physiologists that it is the nature of man to kill.

Certainly the first impulse of the savage is always to kill the first invader upon his domains.

So the giant, actuated doubtless by what he believed was proper resentment at the intrusion, made angry signs at the curious monster before him.

Finding that they were not answered, he was deeply angered.

Whirling his battle ax aloft he hurled it with all his might at the Turret.

It struck the metal sides of the machine with terrific force and bounded off ten yards away.

The force with which the ax had been thrown stowed conclusively the fearful power of the thrower.

"Mercy on us!" cried Frank. "He is strong enough, is he not?"

"Bejabers, I'll not risk a wrestle with bim!" said Barney.

The effect of his assault evidently astonished the savage.

He had very likely fancied it an easy matter to bury the ax in the hide of the monster before him.

But when he found that it made no impression whatever upon those metal sides he was dumfounded.

The natural caution of the savage was at once aroused.

He now began to approach the Turret more cautiously.

He made a detour and recovered his ax.

Then he placed his hands to his mouth and made a strange hooting cry.

The voyagers knew at once that this was a signal.

In a few moments it was answered. From the distance there came the same peculiar cry.

Then in a few seconds down the slope there came bounding a dozen more of the giants.

Matters now looked more serious.

While there was little to fear from one of the giants, there was much to fear from so many of them.

Their combined attack upon the Turret might prove serious.

The giants seemed to hold a hasty and excited consultation.

Then one of them advanced, swinging his battle club.

An idea struck Frank.

He boldly left the pilot-house and stepped out onto the bridge.

This was the first intimation the giant had received that there were human beings like themselves aboard the Turret.

They seemed to be astonished, and stood motionless and silent, gazing at Frank.

The latter quietly advanced to the end of the bridge, and held up his hand in token of amity.

Savages though they were, the giants recognized this token and made reply.

One of them, apparently the leader, advanced with his hands up-held, palm outward.

Frank said to Barney and Pomp in an undertone: "Keep a good line on that fellow with your rifles, but do not shoot him unless you see that it is necessary."

"All roight, sor," replied Barney, "I'll do that."

Frank accordingly descended from the bridge and left the deck of the Turret.

This act fully gained the confidence of the advancing savage. He came forward fearlessly now until he was about six yards distant.

He towered above Frank, who looked like a pigmy in proportion. Almost disdainfully the giant looked down upon Frank Reade, Jr. Then he opened his mouth and began to talk in some kind of gibberish which was all Choctaw to Frank.

Frank shook his head energetically and made reply: "No, I do not understand you!"

But it was a mutual thing. Neither did the giant understand him.

It was now a question as to what sort of a sign manual could be established between them.

For some while Frank tried every device he could think of and finally succeeded in carrying his point.

Several intelligible things passed between them and Frank learned that this was a hunting party of the main tribe.

The hills at this point hid the giants' city, which was not very far distant.

From all outward signs the giants were disposed to be friendly. Indeed, very quickly Frank was upon pleasant terms with them. The giants now all came forward eagerly.

Frank made them some small presents. It was evident that this was the first time that any of this branch of the tribe had ever seen white men.

They were delighted with the presents.

Their manner of manifesting their gratitude was grotesque and strange, they groveling in the dust and heaping quantities of sand about their heads, which, however, they easily shook out of their long hair.

They were astonished when the Turret moved forward by Frank's orders, Barney being in the pilot house.

They were wholly at a loss to understand so wonderful a thing.

Frank was secretly gratified at his success in handling them thus far.

They did not appear to be malicious or evil to an unwonted degree. The young inventor was anxious to view the city and learn more if possible of this wonderful people.

He conveyed his desire to them by means of signs.

They readily acquiesced, and very soon took the lead through the mountain pass to the valley beyond.

The Turret followed slowly.

It was a wonderful sight to see that dozen or more of giants striding ahead of the Turret.

It seemed as if it would have been an easy matter for them to have carried the machine away bodily.

The distance through the pass to the valley beyond was not great. Then a wonderful sight was spread to the gaze of the voyagers.

"Begorra, did yez iver see the loikes av that?" cried Barney, effusively, pointing to the wonderful scene below.

"It is grand!" replied Frank.

Pomp was speechless.

Below was the rich and beautiful valley. In its center was a large lake fully a dozen miles long.

The lower end of it was apparently shallow, and had once been broken up into lagoons and bays.

These had been utilized by the giants in building their city.

The buildings were of vast boulders piled one upon the other with rudely constructed mortar to fill the crevices.

The styles of architecture were of course crude, but the size of the buildings was enormous.

The doors were made with a view to the safe passage through of the huge bodies of their owners.

The streets were broad and grass grown, except where the waters of the lake came in, making a sort of rude Venice.

The city was enormous in extent covering an area of miles.

That the giants were familiar with the use of boats was apparent.

Upon the lake and in the lagoons there were vast numbers of craft, of canoe shape, and some even had rude sails of guanaco skin nicely dressed.

Fire was well known to these natives, for smoke was seen ascending in many places.

The voyagers on board the Turret gazed upon the scene in silent wonder.

The machine slowly moved down into the valley behind the giant guides in front.

Below could be seen hundreds of the giant race, men and women and children engaged in various pursuits.

Barney and Pomp naturally experienced some feelings of timidity at venturing among such a giant race, apparently unprotected.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was prepared for any outburst akin to treachery.

"Have no fear!" he replied in response to Barney's query. "There will be no trouble; I will look out for that."

Down the slope and to the very outskirts of the giant city the Turret went.

The giants leading the way seemed much elevated by the import-

ance of their mission in bringing the newly discovered wonder into the city.

It certainly created a sensation.

The entire city turned out en masse and a furore ensued.

Around the Turret several thousand of the giant race congregated.

Frank had intimated by signs that the giants must keep their fellows from contact with the Turret.

For this purpose and to guard against an attack, Frank charged the body of the Turret with a mild quantity of electricity.

Several of the giants, venturing to touch the metal, received a sensation which terrified them while it did not injure them.

This led them to be more cautious and they kept aloof.

But for hours they thronged about the Turret in wondering crowds.

It was a strange, wild spectacle to the voyagers.

This mighty concourse of giants thus held at arms' length by the subtle current of electricity was certainly wonderful to gaze upon.

The first discoverers of the Turret would not desert it, and now played the part of actual guardians.

The spokesman with whom Frank had managed to get up quite a system of sign talk was always on hand.

From him Frank learned many points regarding the people and their customs.

For a time Frank was doubtful as to whether the giants had a ruler and a form of government or not.

But his doubts on this point were soon satisfied.

From the center of the city there now marched forth a long array of fantastically arrayed barbarians.

They were native soldiers, and behind them with stately tread walked the king.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GIANT CITY.

The giant king was the largest of them all.

With majestic mien he walked and Frank could not estimate his height at anything less than ten feet.

The people all fell back as the king and his retinue appeared.

A wide circle was made about the Turret and the king of the giants advanced into this.

He stood regarding the Turret in a dignified way.

Two of his retinue advanced and bowing low made signs to Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor responded and then descended to the ground and made a respectful salute to the sovereign.

His majesty smiled rather pleasantly and said something unintelligible in a full, rich voice.

Frank responded in English, but the monarch shook his head.

Then the savage with whom Frank had first established a system of signs now came forward.

He bowed low before his sovereign, and then began sign talk to Frank.

"Convey my compliments to the king!" said Frank, by means of signs and nods.

The fellow said something to the king, which was evidently gratifying, for the latter smiled and nodded approvingly.

"Where does the white-faced man come from?" was the king's query.

"From a far land beyond the sea!" was Frank's reply.

Thus the conversation continued for some time.

Then suddenly the king accepted an invitation from Frank to go on board the Turret.

But at this juncture a most unfortunate thing happened.

Barney, who was in the pilot-house leaning out of the window, suddenly shifted his position so that pressure was brought to bear upon the key which connected the dynamos with the insulated outer shell of the Turret.

In an instant it was charged.

Unsuspectingly Frank led the way to the gangway of the Turret.

He mounted it, side by side with the giant king.

At precisely the same moment both stepped upon the deck.

It was fortunate that the full force of the current was not on.

If it had been, doubtless the both of them would have been killed.

But as it was they were hurled back with startling force and such a shock as nigh rendered them insensible.

The giant king was completely taken by surprise.

It was natural that he should regard it for the moment as an attempt upon his life.

The result was most thrilling.

The people instantly sent up a mad yell and came rushing into the circle bent upon destroying the Turret and its occupants.

It was a moment of awful danger to Frank Reade, Jr.

He with difficulty regained his feet.

There was tremendous excitement. The air was full of savage cries. It seemed as if Frank Reade, Jr., would be instantly killed.

Too late Barney comprehended the thrilling truth.

The Celt instantly shut off the current, and shouted:

"Misther Frank, for the love of God, bear up! Shure we'll give the spalpeens a good bastin'."

But Frank had regained his feet and his presence of mind at that moment.

The giant king had no idea what it was that hurt him.

But his momentary anger over he saw that Frank had suffered the same as himself.

He was sufficiently astute to see that after all it was not the young inventor's fault.

Also, he saw that his newly-made friend was in great danger of being killed by his own people.

Frank had recovered, and now hit upon a very happy idea.

This was to make signs to the king in a voluble way.

The giant saw and understood them.

With uplifted battle axes in another moment the people would have been upon Frank Reade, Jr.

But the young inventor was not destined to die thus.

The king swiftly turned and faced the excited mob.

His voice had the ring of thunder in it.

What he said, of course, Frank Reade, Jr., did not know.

But the people instantly retreated, and their demeanor changed as if by magic.

Then the king listened patiently to Frank's attempt to explain the cause of the accident.

This it was not easy to do, for the giant knew very little about the elements of electricity.

But finally Frank satisfied him that the thing should not be repeated.

This time they ascended to the deck in safety.

Then Frank took the king all over the Turret.

He explained to him by signs, as well as he could, the mechanism of the wonderful machine.

Of course, it was all a great mystery to the savage, but he listened silently and respectfully.

He was delighted and amazed beyond all expression.

He hardly knew what it all meant, but everything possessed to him a splendor far beyond his ken.

He was so tall that in the Turret he was obliged to lower his head in passing from one part to another.

Then Frank took him on a ride out upon the plain a short ways.

To say that the giant king was pleased would be stating it mild.

He was simply delighted beyond all measure. The travelers were to him a species of god, a superior being by all means.

Returned to the city, a proclamation was issued, granting the voyagers the liberty of the city and making punishable by death any injury or insult to them.

Then the giant king had his turn.

Frank was invited to a banquet at the palace, a huge dwelling made of great slabs of rock, with a paved floor and furnished with skins and primitive furniture.

The repast consisted of two hundred guanacos, roasted whole, and served up on huge slabs of slate.

There were fish and berries from the woods, nuts in abundance, and a kind of curious paste to imitate a cake made of a peculiar kind of wheat.

Surely the explorers were getting along famously with the giant men of far away Patagonia.

Frank Reade, Jr., reckoned that he would have much of a very interesting nature to give to the world when he should once more reach home.

Thus matters went swimmingly for several days.

Many were the fetes gotten up by the giants in honor of their visitors.

These took the form of out-door banquets and athletic sports.

The giants were famous athletes and the feats they performed were marvelous beyond description.

But the explorers executed their share of the programme.

Barney played Irish airs upon his fiddle.

Pomp jingled the banjo and they sang nicely together. This amused and charmed the giants greatly.

None of them were singers, and they listened spellbound to the wonderful music which seemed to them divine.

Thus matters went on swimmingly for a while.

The sign talk was got down so fine that Frank was able to tell them much of his own land and people.

The giant king, whose name was Don, was completely smitten with the young inventor.

Frank taught the giants many new and wonderful things.

But he could never make them understand the principles of electricity.

They viewed the dynamos and, indeed, the Turret, with wholesome awe.

One day a huge beechwood tree was seen floating in the lake.

It was fully half a mile distant, but Frank trained the pneumatic gun upon it.

A great crowd of the giants were present.

Frank pressed the button and sent a projectile out into the lake.

It struck the tree full force, and the effect was terrific.

The huge tree was split into a million splinters, and a great column of water rose full sixty feet into the air.

It was a wonderful and glorious display.

The giants were all stupefied and many of them ran tremblingly away, while some of them fell upon their faces.

The king made gestures to the effect that Frank Reade, Jr., was small in stature but powerful in knowledge.

For fully a week things ran on smoothly.

King Don was unsparing in his devotion to his guests.

Then one day the city was thrown in a state of great commotion.

Men armed themselves and the king came to Frank in distress.

From the sign talk made, Frank gathered that there was another and more powerful race of giants on the western slope of the Andes.

These were possessed of a darker skin and were more warlike than the white giants, as King Don's people were called.

The black giants were even now upon their way to attack and pillage the people of King Don.

For centuries warfare had been carried on between the two tribes.

The white giants had been growing weaker every year.

It was feared that another battle with the black giants would prove their total extinction.

All these fears King Don conveyed to Frank.

He besought the young inventor's co-operation in pleading terms.

Frank's sympathies were always with the weaker side.

The black giants were more aggressive, and he was determined to give them a lesson they would not forget.

He learned from King Don that they were expected to advance upon the city from the direction of the pampas.

The reason for this was that they were compelled to completely make a detour of the range on account of inaccessible cliffs to the westward.

Frank at once gave orders to Barney and Pomp.

"Have everything ready for a cruise in that direction," he said.

"Let us see if we can't give those rascals a setback."

"Begorra, we kin jest do that same!" cried Barney.

And in a very short space of time the Turret was shipshape and ready for action.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RESCUE.

THE near future seemed likely to hold thrilling events.

Thus far the Patagonian travelers had greatly enjoyed their experiences.

They had fought the Red Indians, raced with the prairie fires, shot guanacos and ostriches, explored buried cities and hobnobbed with the only and greatest race of giants on earth.

And now they were going out to do battle with an army of black giants.

They had come through all this unscathed.

In this respect they were fortunate.

But the future held catastrophies for them of which they little dreamed.

As soon as the Turret was ready it started out to intercept the black giants.

King Don and his people were elated.

They counted with glee upon the nice little surprise party in store for their foes.

Frank smiled at their enthusiasm, but said little.

His sympathies were wholly with the white giants.

The Turret left the giant city and proceeded due east up the valley.

No sooner had the range been crossed and the pampas brought to view than action began.

Barney sighted a large body of men in a glen two miles below.

Careful study with a glass revealed the fact that they were the war party of the black giants.

They seemed to be holding some sort of a war dance or orgy in the beechwood dell.

"Begorra, it's them without a doubt!" cried Barney.

"I jes' fink we had better gib dem some hot shot," suggested Pomp.

"All right," said Frank. "Here goes!"

The young inventor went to the pneumatic gun and sighted it.

But he did not discharge it.

Something restrained him.

"I don't believe I'll do it yet," he muttered. "I want to see what they are doing down there first."

So he allowed the Turret to slide gently down the slope.

Frank made a detour to the northward, so as to approach the spot unobserved.

In this he was wise.

After events proved this.

Gradually Frank approached the spot where the black giants were congregated.

The Turret was enabled to run quite near to the spot without being observed.

And this resulted in a startling revelation.

Several thousand of the black giants were congregated in the glade.

And in their midst Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp beheld a sight which almost made their blood run cold.

There were three white men bound to stakes, around which were heaped great piles of brushwood.

It required only a glance for them to recognize the three men.

They were the three travelers, Everhard, Wayne and Bent.

They had escaped the pampas fire in some miraculous manner.

But only to fall into the clutches of the black giants.

Death hovered over them.

The expression of despair upon the faces of the three doomed men was something pitiable to witness.

It was a moment of great excitement to the voyagers.

The giants were already beginning to apply the torch.

It would require but a short while to reduce the unfortunate trio to ashes.

Never had our friends gazed upon a more villainous set than these same black giants.

The followers of King Don were in great contrast with them.

On all the face of the earth no harder, more miserable-looking set could be imagined.

They were nearly naked, huge brawny-muscled fellows with repulsive features and black skins.

The unfortunate white man who should fall into their clutches need not look for mercy.

Frank saw this at once.

Also, that it was necessary to make immediate action to save them.

If this was not done they would soon be but a heap of ashes.

Frank carefully studied the situation and then decided upon a plan of action.

He got the angle of the three death stakes and calculated the distance. Then he trained the pneumatic gun.

It was but a moment's work to press the electric button.

There was a recoil, a hissing noise, and the projectile shot forth.

It struck the group of savages a fraction of a second later.

In an instant there was a mighty explosion, an awful upheaval, and the air was instantly filled with flying bodies, earth and debris.

It seemed as if a hundred of the giants had been slaughtered by that one bolt.

Then quick as thought Frank thrust another projectile into the breach.

Hiss—iss—boom!

Another destructive explosion followed. The effect upon the giants was wonderful.

They instantly were thrown into a fearful panic.

It was a stunning and inexplicable shock to them.

It was as if an enraged Jove had begun hurling bolts into their midst.

They could not see from whence they came, nor could they guess their nature.

Superstition is an inherent trait of a savage.

They waited for nothing, but fled in wild confusion.

No thought was given to the prisoners at the stakes.

They thought only of their own self-preservation; this was more to them than aught else.

Frank had no desire to make useless slaughter.

He really cared only at present to save the three Americans.

They had at once divined the truth and were wild with joy.

Of course they were not a little surprised at the sudden appearance of the Turret.

But it meant deliverance to them, and this was what they cared more for than aught else just then.

And now as the giants made a mad retreat, down into the glade glided the electric Turret.

Barney and Pomp sprung down from the bridge.

Over the rail they went, and were soon by the side of the prisoners.

It was but a moment's work to cut their bonds.

Words cannot express their joy.

Wild cheers burst from their lips, and they capered with literal joy.

"Hurrah for Frank Reade, Jr!"

"Hurrah for the electric Turret!"

"We are saved!"

They rushed up to the rail and fairly embraced Frank. It was a joyous meeting.

Then explanations followed.

Each told their story.

It seemed that the three men had ridden madly to the northward after losing sight of the Turret.

They were hard pressed by the flames, when it suddenly occurred to Everhard to start a counter fire.

This was done, and as it ran before them they followed it.

This left them, of course, safely upon the burn, and as the old fire came up it wasted itself.

This was the cause of the fire which had so suddenly shut down around the Turret.

But it had been the saving of the lives of the three explorers.

However, all was over and the danger for the time past.

But yet it might return at any moment.

The giants had now caught sight of the Turret and saw the white men on its deck.

This somewhat restored their courage.

They were really brave and reckless fellows. They rallied and made a bold front not a quarter mile distant.

Frank saw this and kept an eye on them.

"Well, Mr. Reade," cried Everhard, "I am glad that you escaped that fire all safely. It was really a hard pull."

"It was," agreed Frank. "However, we will now hope for better times. But just now it looks squally."

"Ah, indeed!"

"We have not yet done with those savages."

"You think not?"

"I know it."

Frank with this proceeded to detail their experiences with King Don and his men.

The explorers listened with interest.

Then Everhard said:

"Boys, I am getting sick of this kind of life."

"You are?"

"I am."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going home to America."

"What, and give up the search for the golden city?"

"I don't believe that it exists, or that there is anything here for me. I am going back home."

"Well," said Prof. Bent, "I'll go with you."

The other, Chester Wayne, looked at his companions in surprise.

"Of course I can't stay here alone," he said.

"But how will you return just now?" asked Frank Reade, Jr. "You have no horses, and you cannot reach the coast on foot."

"We can find horses."

"That is not easy."

"We will catch and train some wild horses," said Everhard. "I'll risk but that we will get back."

"You will do well!" said Frank Reade, Jr., skeptically. "Will you take my advice?"

"What is it?"

"For the time you can travel with us aboard the Turret."

The three explorers looked at each other a moment.

"But we shall discommode you!"

"Not a bit of it."

"Then we will gladly accept," declared Everhard, eagerly.

The three explorers were delighted, and Frank made comfortable quarters for them.

"Now," said the young inventor, "we will give those black giants a good drubbing, so that they will not trouble King Don and his men again."

"And what next?" asked Everhard.

"I want to take a little trip over the Andes," said Frank. "Then I am ready to go home."

"And may we be allowed to accompany you?"

"Certainly!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE EARTHQUAKE.

WORDS cannot express the keen pleasure of the explorers.

"You are members of our party now!" said Frank, pleasantly. "We will co-operate in this purpose of exploring Patagonia."

"Will not that be grand?" cried Prof. Bent. "We shall accomplish something now I am sure."

But the first move as Frank declared was to get rid of the black giants.

They must be disheartened in their intent to destroy King Don and his people.

So Frank gave pursuit.

But the savages had scattered and it was hard to find any of them.

They kept well out of reach.

There were plenty of hiding-places and these they quickly sought.

However, a long and extended trip was made with the Turret.

Nightfall coming on, camp was made in a beechwood glen by a bubbling spring of clear water.

The next morning early the Turret was on its return to the city of King Don.

Over the mountain wall the Turret ran and then made the descent into the wonderful valley.

The city of stone lay below a picturesque and handsome scene. Of course the three American explorers were greatly interested.

The giant people could be plainly seen walking the streets or rowing upon the vast lake in their boats.

"So that is the city of King Don?" asked Everhard, as he studied it through a glass.

"It is!" replied Frank.

But the words had hardly left his lips when a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly there was a peculiar tremor and the dynamos of the Turret began to hiss and sputter fiercely.

"Too much current, Barney," cried Frank, "be careful."

"Divil a bit, sor!" cried the Celt.

"What is the matter then?"

"I don't know, sor."

But Prof. Bent who had been studying the landscape cried:

"My God, what's that?"

Every eye was turned in the direction indicated by Bent.

And a strange, wild thrill went through the breasts of all.

It was a terrible awe inspiring sight which they beheld.

The country beyond the lake seemed to be tossing and heaving like a ship at sea.

Forests were leveled, and hills rose and fell, and one huge mountain were cleft from base to summit by the shock.

"An earthquake!" gasped Frank.

This was true.

The shock was not felt so severely where they stood.

But a terrible scene was being enacted down there in the valley.

The horses of the giants were seen to be tumbling about them and all was panic and confusion.

What was more, the land upon which King Don's city stood, began to settle rapidly, and the waters of the lake to sweep over it.

In a very few moments the entire city was lost to view, and the waters of the lake occupied the spot.

It was a dreadful scene to look upon, indeed.

For one awful moment the despairing, panic-stricken people were seen scrambling for their lives.

Then the waters shut over them, and the end had come.

The earthquake had ceased.

But the rumbling of internal thunder continued, and now a fearful thing happened.

It was such a spectacle as probably few men had ever viewed.

Suddenly, upon the peak of a high mountain near by, there was a rattling discharge like artillery.

Huge stones were flung high into the air, and it seemed as if the entire mountain was being disintegrated.

Then a long funnel shaped column of smoke shot up into the air.

After it came a burst of vivid flame.

Then there was the bubbling of a liquid mass, which came plunging down the mountain side in torrents.

"An eruption!" cried Prof. Bent, excitedly. "This sight is worth a thousand dollars to me."

The scientist instantly began to make notes.

He was right.

It was an eruption.

Nature's mighty internal forces were at work upon a new and mighty evolution.

The party were witnessing one of the most wonderful of sights, the creating of a new volcano.

Words could not describe the wonderful scene adequately.

"By Jupiter! is not that a wonderful thing?" cried Everhard.

"Beyond all description!" said Chester Wayne.

Spellbound, the explorers all stood in their secure position and watched it.

But Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp thought, with the keenest of regrets, of King Don and his people.

"It is too awful!" the young inventor murmured. "All are swept away in one moment."

"Begorra, it's a murtherin' shame!" cried Barney.

"Golly! it am too drefful bad!" said Pomp.

Probably not one of the white giants survived.

It seemed unjust that they should perish thus and the black giants survive.

But it was the law of Nature and the will of God.

When the Maker wills, human power or opposition is of little avail.

The thunder of the new volcano was now terrific.

In the last few minutes the whole face of the country about had undergone a mighty change.

It was impossible to locate one familiar point. All was changed.

The great volumes of lava now rushing down the mountain side merged with the waters of the lake.

The effect was terrific.

Beyond all powers of description was that scene which followed.

The lake waters began to instantly become converted into steam.

The furious hissing, boiling, mighty cauldron below could hardly be identified with the once peaceful body of water upon which the people of King Don had so fearlessly navigated.

But our adventurers had seen enough.

Sick at heart they turned away.

Only the scientist, Prof. Bent, lingered, and even he was overcome with the horror of the thing.

Frank Reade, Jr., could not help thinking of the unlucky race.

"Poor souls!" he muttered, "they were barbarians surely. Yet they were human, and to see them, mothers, fathers, children, all root and branch, swept out of existence so summarily is sad, indeed!"

"You are right!" agreed Cecil Everhard, regretfully.

All went on board the Turret, and Frank headed it back over the mountain wall.

For some while the dreadful scene in their rear remained in view.

Then the ridge was crossed and the wide-spreading pampas once more burst into view.

The machine was headed due east.

Soon they were upon the level plain.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., went into the Turret and called all after him.

When they had all appeared the young inventor said briefly:

"Gentlemen, I have called you here for the purpose of discussion. Shall we remain much longer in this God-forsaken country?"

There was a moment of silence.

Frank looked from one face to another, and continued:

"I don't know that we have anything to gain by remaining here. We have accomplished much of our purpose. We have found the giant race and have seen them destroyed."

Prof. Bent arose to his feet.

"Mr. Reade," he said, "I have accomplished enough to fully satisfy me. I am ready to go at any time."

"So am I!" cried Everhard.

Wayne was the only one to demur.

"I am not quite satisfied," he said, slowly. "I had hoped to find those deposits of gold said to be so plentiful hereabouts."

"They do not exist!" declared Frank, positively.

"I hardly think we have given it sufficient trial."

"Very well, then, we will remain for further trial," said Frank.

"I will abide by a vote of the party," said Wayne.

"Let it be so," cried Everhard. "All in favor of staying hold up the right hand."

Only Wayne held up his hand.

It was decided to go.

"I do not wish to be understood as standing out against the majority," said Wayne. "We will make the resolution unanimous."

All cheered this.

Then the Turret was headed for the Atlantic coast.

For several days the party traveled without incident across the plains.

To be sure several times they narrowly avoided being overtaken by prairie fires.

All the while they were constantly in view of smoke and flames.

Truly Patagonia was rightly named the "Land of Fire."

But they were not destined to reach the coast without some mishap.

Frank had calculated that they were hardly two hundred miles from the coast when a thrilling thing happened.

It was a dark night and the Turret was running at full speed.

The search-light's glare lit up the plain far ahead.

It was considered safe to run this way after dark, for the search-light made all ahead plain.

Moreover, the character of the pampas was such that there was little danger of colliding with any sizable object.

So the Turret was thus making time when the disaster came.

Barney was in the pilot-house, and kept the speed of the Turret uniform.

Across the floor-like expanse the machine boomed at a lively rate. Nobody dreamed of any possible danger.

Frank Reade, Jr., was aft on the rear deck with the three explorers.

They were all engaged in a lively discussion.

Arguments were being made upon the worth of Patagonia as an agricultural district.

"I tell you it never will do," cried Everhard, emphatically. "The only thing you can ever raise here is stock."

"Pshaw!" said Wayne. "The land which will graze stock will bear cultivation."

"Allow that, what will you do with your products?"

"The markets of the world are open to you."

"Distance defeats that."

Before another word could be uttered, a thrilling cry came from Barney.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

BARNEY'S cry echoed wildly through the Turret.

In an instant every man was upon his feet.

Then there was a swinging, jarring, jolting and sinking motion. Every man was prostrated.

"Thunder and lightning!" screamed Everhard. "What has happened?"

Some wet substance was flooding the deck.

Everybody was knee deep in it.

What was it?"

It was hot water.

The confusion which ensued for some moments was intense.

But despite this, Frank Reade, Jr., had been able to make his way to the pilot-house.

Here Barney was clinging to the wheel.

The Turret had come to a full stop. In the search-light's glare Frank saw the appalling truth.

The Turret had ran full-tilt into a treacherous quagmire which is not uncommon on the pampas.

These are often on a dead level with the plain, and the unsuspecting traveler does not realize his danger until he is really in the clutches of the deadly quicksand.

The Turret was slowly sinking.

In a moment Frank realized the appalling fact that nothing could be done to extricate it.

It would certainly continue to sink until the sand should cover it entirely from sight.

The Turret was lost.

It was a terrible blow to the young inventor.

It meant the irretrievable loss of thousands of dollars.

What was more it left the party alone upon the pampas, several hundred miles from the point where they were to reach the return steamer.

And there was no time to lose if they would save their own lives.

The Turret was sinking fast and they would surely go down with it unless they at once left it.

The rest of the party were overwhelmed with horror and dismay when they heard the truth.

"Oh, God, we are lost!" cried Everhard, bitterly.

But Frank Reade, Jr.'s, cool courage now held the others up.

By his direction many necessary things were secured.

Then it was an easy matter to leap from the rear end of the Turret out upon the hard floor of the prairie.

It was a terrible thing to crouch there that night and see the Turret rapidly disappear from view.

But this they were compelled to do.

By the early morning light little was left above ground of the electric Turret.

That wonderful triumph of the genius of Frank Reade, Jr., was lost forever.

Slowly and sadly the party took up their wearisome march to the sea.

That was a terrible experience. For weeks they toiled on, and it was a happy day when, ragged and footsore and half starved, they came out upon an eminence and saw the blue sea before them.

As luck had it, they struck the very point from which they had started upon the eventful journey.

And the cry of joy which escaped their lips was heartfelt, as they saw that the steamer was there awaiting them.

After much suffering and many thrilling adventures, the wonderful trip across the Land of Fire had reached its end.

Signals were made, and they were quickly taken aboard. Anchor was at once raised, and they bid farewell without regrets to the wild Land of Fire.

Once more Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp were safely at home in Readestown.

Everybody welcomed them warmly, and Frank announced his intention to remain at home for a while.

But his genius would not remain idle, and he was soon at work upon a new and grand invention.

What that was and how he succeeded with it we will leave to some future time to tell.

[THE END.]

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